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ABSTRACT

This booklet provides parents with practical ways to introduce their children to the arts with the continuous message to encourage children to imagine. This book revises and updates the earlier publication "Three Rs for the '90s." Following the foreword by Robert Coles and an introduction by Jane Alexander, the chapters include: (1) "Dance and Your Child"; (2) "The Theater and Children"; (3) "Your Child and the Visual Arts"; (4) Media Literacy and Children"; (5) "From Words to Stories"; (6) "Folk Arts: Art in Everyday Life"; (7) "Architecture and Children"; and (8) "Music and Your Child's Education." An appendix contains additional art education resources for parents. (EH)

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# imagine!

*Introducing your child to the arts*

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# imagine!

*Introducing your child*

*to the arts*

NATIONAL
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FOR THE ARTS

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1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20506
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1997

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## a message to parents

*Imagine!* is designed to show parents some practical ways to introduce their children to the arts. Running through all of these essays is a simple and consistent message: *encourage your children to imagine.*

This book revises and updates an earlier publication, *Three Rs for the '90s.* Essays from five private organizations, the American Alliance for Theatre & Education, the Music Educators National Conference, the National Art Education Association, the National Dance Association, and the Teachers & Writers Collaborative, were updated, and these are joined by essays on folk and traditional arts by the National Task Force on Folk Arts and Education and on architecture by the Foundation for Architecture. An additional essay on media arts rounds out the chapters. We are indebted as well to Robert Coles, writer, educator and psychiatrist, for the foreword to the book.

In the appendix, you will find additional resources for you to learn more about arts education and introducing your children to the arts. The National Endowment for the Arts has supported programs for children and arts education since its inception in 1965. As part of our mission, we are charged with broadening public participation in the arts. To find out more about this work, we encourage you to visit our World Wide Web site at **http://arts.endow.gov** or to contact us for a history of the agency and a guide to its grantmaking programs.

*Office of Public Information*
*National Endowment for the Arts*
*1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW*
*Washington, DC 20506*

## foreword

*Robert Coles*

During my residency years at the Children's Hospital in Boston I met many boys and girls who were struggling with serious, even life-threatening illnesses. Under such circumstances those youngsters would sometimes become remarkably introspective—they would ask the biggest possible questions. I well remember, for instance, a twelve year-old girl who had contracted polio, lost the use of her legs. She had been taking ballet lessons for five years, had become a conscientious, skilled dancer, even at times an inspired one, so her parents told me, and too, several of her friends who came to visit. Now, she couldn't walk, never mind dance, and all who knew her were devastated by what had happened—the end of a promising young dancer's chosen vocation before it could really take shape. But the youth was not as troubled as those who came daily to spend time with her. She told me, one day, that she was, of course, made very sad by what had happened—yet, she was not going to be "pulled down" by this unexpected, fateful turn of events. She did, after all, have her arms working quite well, she reminded me—and then, this: "I'll begin learning to paint."

I fear that at the time I was all too prepared to regard such a declaration as evidence of a troubled mind's response to a medical tragedy—a refusal to acknowledge just how devastating the polio virus had been. Overnight, virtually, a child's hopes and dreams had turned to naught. Bravely, she was determined to make the best of things; but "underneath," as people like me would put it—and as I regret to say, I did, indeed, view the matter—she was full of anxiety and melancholy. Her apparently cheerful insistence that she would be "alright," that she would turn from ballet to art, from the dance floor to the canvas, only indicated (for me) the depth of her sorrow, her legitimate anger—one more instance of "denial" in the early stages of a patient's recuperative life.

I would soon enough learn otherwise, though. This young lady showed me, one day, a sketch she'd done, a picture of a horse, bearing a straight-backed rider in obvious control, on its way down a road lined with sturdy trees, and too, some bushes, some hedges. The sun shone above, lighting up a clear sky. On either side of the road, beyond the trees, stretched inviting meadows strewn with flowers—a carefully and skillfully rendered postcard scene. I was, naturally, impressed, delighted, and said so. My young patient thanked me for my welcome remarks, but she clearly felt that I needed a bit of instruction: "You'll see, it'll be alright—we'll keep going."

I was stunned by the directness of her remark—her surprising capacity for introspection, her stubborn determination to make the best, the very best of things, her quick and resolute turn from one of the arts to another, from her legs to her arms and hands, as it were. (She had, of course, used the latter in the course of her dancing life.) By then, I was ready to put aside psychology in favor of a willingness to understand this girl on her own terms: "the polio got my legs, but I'll make my hands dance now," she said to me—and I stood in silent awe.

In time, I realized that I was being told (shown) something of enormous importance by a mere "child," not yet in high school—that for her the ballet, and now the work of a would-be artist, were more than mere hobbies, or modes of personal expression. With her lower limbs, then her upper limbs, she was affirming herself mightily, yes, but also trying to find herself on a life's journey. She had shown me what "art" meant to her, enabled in her—beauty glimpsed and appreciated, a direction or purpose in life explored. In a sense she had already discovered what some of us spend a lifetime seeking—a way of affirming her particular humanity.

Nor is she to be regarded as all that unusual—a talented exception of sorts. All the time in my work with children, I learn of the meaning of the arts to their intellectual and moral and spiritual development—a means of figuring out who they are, what they consider important, where they would like to go (in life) and why. A child dancing or singing or painting or performing in a play or writing,

story-telling, is a child giving personal expression to himself or herself, yes, but also a child affirming his or her very humanity—for we are the creature of awareness, who craves an understanding of things, who wants to make things known, who seeks the connection, the instruction that words make possible, who sings of what was, what is, what might be, who summons crayons or paint brushes to convey the visible, to stir the imagination, to venture beyond the apparent, and who leaps across a stage, muses on it in the sure knowledge, as the great bard reminded us, that "all the world's a stage."

For our children, the arts, then, mean everything—they provide our sons and daughters with the kind of road that young patient of mine insisted on showing me: a road that leads to self-discovery, self-affirmation; a road that takes the singer or writer or dancer or painter or actor outside the confines of the self, into the arms, really, of others, those who hear, read, look, watch, an audience of fellow human beings whose affirming nod matters very much to all of us. Even as that girl was determined to find beauty, give it the life of her limbs, one way or the other, all children have within them a similar inclination. True, talent varies—but our humanity defines us as called to comprehend, to communicate, and the arts are the means by which we do so. Like the horse in that girl's drawing, they carry us along, enable us to notice, to pay heed, to look inward and outward, both. "I've lost [the use of] my legs," my young hospital patient long ago told me, but she was quick to remind me of this: "I've not lost me, I'm still here"—and so she was, courtesy of her dancer's mettle and vigor, etched in her soul, no matter the inroads of a virus, and courtesy of her artist's soulful energy summoned so forthrightly, and (for all of us as her intended audience, her witnesses) put to paper quite unforgettably.

*Robert Coles is a psychiatrist, professor at Harvard University, and author of more than fifty books, including the acclaimed* Children of Crisis *series and* The Inner Life of Children *series. His most recent book is* The Moral Intelligence of Children.

## introduction

*Jane Alexander*

Watch a child grow from infancy through childhood, and you witness a willed act of creation. Using their senses and imagination, shaped through experience, children form their personalities, opinions, outlooks, and relationships. Scientists now theorize that the first two years of life are the most important years for developing character, healthy mental, physical and emotional lives. How the imagination is nurtured during early childhood can play a pivotal role in each person's future success in all aspects of life.

Our children are hard-wired to be creative and imaginative. Even the smallest infant soaks up everything like a sponge, ordering sights and sounds, behavior and response, to figure out their place in the world. From the earliest age, we are in tune with the aesthetic dimensions of the world, the beautiful and the sublime.

Just think of how we sing to comfort a crying infant, how we tell stories in rhyme from the earliest age as if narrative and rhythm were instinctual. The very stuff of a young child's world are the products and processes of art: shape, color, tone, rhythm, sound, movement. Children at play, inventing games and situations, engage in an elementary theater of their own design.

On the wall behind my desk, I have a framed drawing done by a 5-year old girl from LaCrosse, Wisconsin. The self-portrait is dominated in the center by her radiant smile, and in the corner, a sun shines on her and the flying bird, the blossoming flowers. It's a wonderful piece, filled with love and happiness. This girl is ready to learn: she's creative, self-expressive, and confident.

Parents have a tremendous responsibility and privilege in nurturing the growth of the imagination in their children. This booklet is designed as a practical aide

in that nurturing process. The late Ernest Boyer, former U.S. Commissioner of Education and President of the Carnegie Foundation, advocated for a revolution in our thinking about how to introduce our children to the arts. He loved to tell the story of a young college graduate, home from Spring Break, who sits down to color with her five-year-old niece.

The child took the crayons and coloring book and quickly leafed past 30 pages of pictures until she found a blank page on the back. When the college student asked her niece why she chose to color where there was no picture, the little girl replied, "Outside the lines, you can do anything you want."

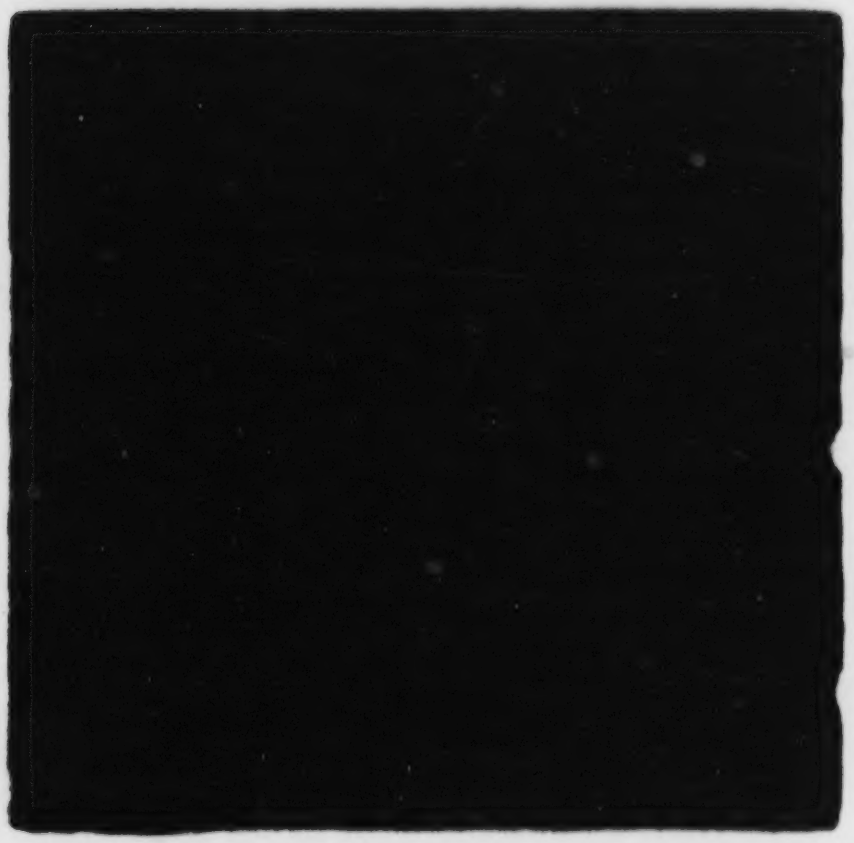
For too long we have educated our children "within the lines" as if every brain were similarly shaped, as if every mind were alike. Educator Howard Gardner at Harvard with his "Project Zero" has identified seven discrete ways people learn and create themselves: *language, math and logic, music, spatial reasoning, movement, interpersonal intelligence*—how we know others—and *intrapersonal intelligence*—how we know ourselves. While schools most often structure curricula to work with students' linguistic, math, and logical strengths, the arts may be the only way to teach that includes all seven ways of learning and thinking.



Studies have shown that arts education in schools:

- provide greater motivation to learn in all subjects;
- increase attendance rates for students and teachers;
- raise test scores, including SATs;
- engage students more fully in the learning process;
- give teachers a sense of renewal and challenge, especially when the arts are integrated with other subjects;
- develop higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills.

If that isn't motivation enough, employers, particularly those in the new high-tech information industries are looking for workers that can respond creatively and flexibly to the challenges ahead. Richard Gurin, President & CEO of Binney & Smith, says: "The business leaders of tomorrow will need what the arts



can give them. They need to see and hear and feel the world. They need to imagine and conceptualize and express themselves. They need to lead with vision and passion. And these are the characteristics are young people develop when they are encouraged to participate in the arts."

Parents, teachers, schools and communities invest in the future when they invest in arts education at home and in the classroom. Encouraging free imagination and discovery through the arts prepares our children for the challenges of the next century. When we teach a child to draw, we teach him how to see. When we

teach a child to play a musical instruments, we teach her how to listen. When we teach a child to dance, we teach him how to move through life with grace. When we teach a child to read or write, we teach her how to think. When we nurture imagination, we create a better world, one child at a time.

The National Endowment for the Arts has long believed in the power of arts education. Over the course of our history, we have placed tens of thousands of artists in schools and other settings to reach millions of children in the classroom. We have invested in arts education research, the voluntary National Standards for Arts

Education, and other strategies to ensure that every child has a basic arts education, beginning in kindergarten and going through 12th grade.

Parents have a crucial role to play in ensuring that their local school districts realize that arts education is not a frill, but an essential part of the curriculum. But their most important task begins at home. *Imagine!* is designed to give you tips, point you in the right direction, but there is no secret for introducing your child to the arts, encouraging curiosity and imagination. As with most aspects of healthy families, introducing your children to the arts is a matter of faith and love.

Joseph Campbell, the mythologist, suggested that we live our life as a poem, active in its own making, aware of the power of image and word, symbol and metaphor, cognizant of its transcendent meaning as our life unfolds. I believe in the power of the arts to help every child find a richer, more meaningful life. Art can revitalize our communities, heal our social and personal pains, give us the myths and stories, images and sounds to direct our own lives.

Children who have the arts at home and school understand that our lives are indeed poems in the making, songs unsung, a dance of days and a symphony of years.

*Jane Alexander was appointed Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1993. She is an actress, producer, and author.*

# dance and your child

Dance education has many benefits:

*Physical.* Dance helps to increase flexibility, improve circulation, tone the body and develop muscles. It also improves posture, balance and coordination.

*Intellectual.* Dance enriches learning through a variety of perspectives, both traditional and experimental.

*Aesthetic.* Dance awakens consciousness of beauty, lending new meaning to movement and form.

*Cultural.* Dance increases understanding and appreciation for forms, choices and rituals from a broad range of historical, social and cultural perspectives.

*Emotional.* Dance helps develop self-confidence and self-esteem in a stimulating environment.

*Social.* Dance improves sensitivity, understanding, appreciation and consideration for others, both for their similarities and differences.

**Dance is the hidden language of the soul.**

*Martha Graham*

### Dance engages the whole person

Although dance can be great exercise, it is primarily an art form and an aesthetic expression of mind and body. Dance as an art form has three dimensions:

*Learning*. Like other art forms, dance helps us to perceive and communicate who we are.

*Knowledge*. Dance has its own body of knowledge which can be shared, passed on and enlarged.

*Experience*. The very nature of dance is best discovered through experiencing it. In this it is almost unique as an art form, and very special as part of a child's education.

By combining these three dimensions, dance engages the whole person in simultaneously moving, thinking and feeling. Thus dance education can enhance your child's physical, mental and emotional development. This holds true for boys and girls alike.

### Dance for young children

For young children, dance offers avenues for exploration, discovery and the development of natural instincts for movement. Dance activities offer many benefits for children, encouraging mental and emotional development as well as obviously enhancing motor skills.

Dancing gives the young child a chance to experience and understand both personal and social perspectives in a stimulating situation. Dancing offers opportunities to express thoughts and feelings and to understand others' thoughts and feelings.

The dynamic balance of dance's physical, mental and emotional aspects should be present in dance education, regardless of whether the child plans to pursue a career in dance. As in other arts disciplines, professional preparation in dance demands years of rigorous education, training and practice.

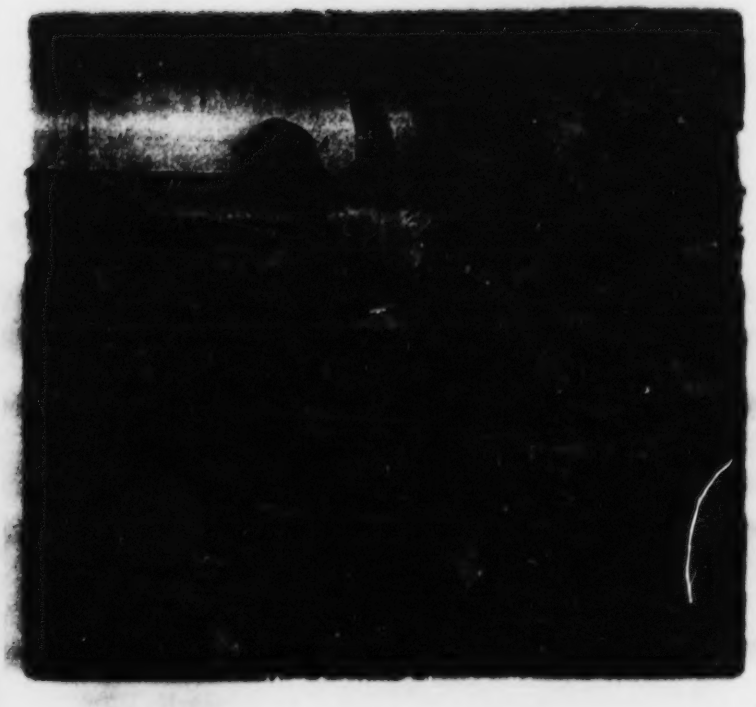
**What you can do to get your child started in dance**

As a parent, you can offer your child early exposure to the art of dance and movement through many activities:

- Encourage your child to experience movement. Ask questions like "How many ways can you balance yourself besides standing?" and "How many different ways can you move your head (arms, legs, upper body)?" Questions like these will help your child become aware of his body and its relationship to other people and the environment.
- Provide a place and times for your child to explore and invent movements. Have her tell a story by acting it out with body movements. Or, ask him to move with different types of walks (downhill, on parade, stiff, up stairs) or to pretend to use different kinds of vehicles (bicycle, skateboard, car, horse, etc.).
- Encourage the child to relate movement to rhythm. This can be as simple as getting a child to clap, rock or hop to music or a rhythmic beat. Your child may also enjoy moving or dancing to familiar songs and nursery rhymes. The goal is to get the child to experience movement as it relates to music or rhythm.
- Allow the child to experiment with basic movements. Walking, running, jumping, skipping, and such are basic locomotor movements. By varying the size, level and direction of these basics, children discover a large number of movements which can be combined to form basic dance steps.

### Where to find dance instruction

Educators and teacher organizations increasingly recognize creative movement as integral to children's development, and there are a number of exemplary dance education programs in elementary schools. But unfortunately, well-balanced dance programs are not found consistently in our schools today. As a parent you can do two things to ensure good dance education for your child.



- First, look into the situation in your school and school district. Find what importance is given to dance and advocate making it a high priority. Second, look into private instruction in studios, community centers, parks and recreation programs, summer camps and other enterprises such as YWCAs.
- In both cases, assure yourself that a dance program is appropriate for your child's physical and social development and that it is educationally sound. The following information may help you review the dance instruction in your local school, private studio or other setting.

### Evaluating teachers and classes

Ask the following questions about teacher(s) and classes before enrolling your child:

- Can I observe the class first?
- Does the teacher seem aware of the physical, emotional and social development and needs of the students? Is she supportive of each student's abilities, potential and goals?



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Does the teacher seem enthusiastic about the work? Does he use imaginative, varied and interesting approaches to the material being taught?

Is the teacher well trained and qualified? Is she familiar with human anatomy and the proper use of the body? Is she able to effectively communicate her knowledge?

Are the students grouped according to age, physical abilities and social development? Are class size and duration appropriate for the age group?

*The following class sizes and durations are suggested:*

| Age | Class Size | Duration |
|---|---|---|
| 3–5 | 7–15 | 30–45 minutes |
| 6–8 | 20 | 45–60 minutes |
| 9–12 | 25 | 60–90 minutes |

Does the class provide satisfaction and enjoyment? Does the teacher give time for movement exploration? Is required attire appropriate and comfortable?

**Facilities and other considerations**

A good place for classes offers the following:

Space that is clean, well-ventilated, well-lit and free of obstructions.

A floor that is resilient and well-maintained. (A suspended wood floor is best to avoid physical stress, but certain treatments over cement and tile can accommodate dance that does not include a great deal of landing from jumps.) Floor space should be adequate for the class size and the age of the participants, ideally 100 square feet per student.

Adequate space for changing clothes, access to drinking water and restrooms.

Dance class should not over-stress the body. Dance for children should concentrate on individualization, creativity and movement exploration. Major portions of the class should not be devoted to performances or preparing for recitals.

Formal instruction in specific dance forms should not begin before age 7 or 8 depending on the development of the child and previous experience.

Pointe work (ballet dancing on "toe") should not begin before there is well-developed body coordination, adequate strength, proper skeletal alignment and working body placement. Special attention must be given to the development of the feet, legs and back. Very few children should start pointe work before age 11.

*Additional information is available from:*

*National Dance Association*
*1900 Association Drive, Reston VA 22091-1502*
*http://www.aahperd.org/nda.html*

# the theater and children

Children of all ages love to pretend, to enter worlds of the imagination. As toddlers, they mimic things they see in everyday life. By elementary school age, they act out stories, creating original plots or adapting fairy tales and real-life events. By middle school, they're ready for more formal play-acting: going on stage to present prepared scripts, whether scenes from the classics or their own inventions. In other words, each stage of childhood has its own forms of drama, and all these forms help children grow and learn.

**"Dramatic play" and "creative drama"**

Children enter the world of make-believe first as toddlers when they discover the soul of theater by engaging in activities they see around them and by putting themselves in the places of others. This activity involves mind, body and imagination. It is dramatic play, what one educator calls "rehearsal for life." An extension of ordinary play, creative play—the root of theater—is essential to a child's full development.

As children grow older, their play develops structure. They act out favorite stories, create original situations from life experiences, and imagine themselves in fantasy worlds where anything is possible. If they are encouraged in this kind of play at home, they become ready for creative drama by the time they enter primary school. As essential as dramatic play is to a child's healthy development, creative drama is an art form, a socializing activity and a means of learning. At this point, guidance by an experienced teacher or leader is needed, someone to guide the drama, to help the young players deepen their experiences and express themselves more effectively.

Creative drama is not acting as adults think of it. It requires no script or memorized lines. It is improvised and centers on children as the participants. Older children often want to extend the process and present their work for an audience. This is fine, so long as the desire to "go public" comes from them, for it is the process rather than the product that is important for youngsters.

In middle school or junior high, many children become ready for what most people think of as the "theater arts" which involve a stage, actors and a play. This implies theater's formal elements: acting, directing, scene and costume design, as well as technical concerns such as stage management, set building, lighting, publicity, etc.

Besides creating theater in its many forms, children also benefit from seeing it. Children's theater, comprising an ever-growing diversity of companies and scripts, is an excellent introduction to lifelong enjoyment of theater.

For young children the theater arts are best used informally and playfully. This offers pre-kindergarten and elementary-age children opportunities to make theater that is a natural extension of their physical, intellectual and emotional lives. Creative drama builds on the universal human desire to understand our world by imitating and reenacting it.

As a parent, you can help your child enjoy dramatic play, even if you have had no theater background or experience. First of all, you can *encourage your child to play*. Enter into the game, taking cues as to your role. For example, your daughter may want you to be a storekeeper or a customer, a doctor or a patient, a bus driver or passenger, depending on which character she wants to be. Provide a place for creative drama. This could be a corner of the child's room where toys are kept. "Props" can be simple and commonplace. For instance, a scarf can become a shawl, a sash or any number of things. Hats can denote different characters. Baskets, bags and plastic dishes are all useful props.

Dramatic play need not be confined to one space, for it is spontaneous and the impulse to enact a character or imitate an action is rarely planned in advance. Chances are it will be brief and fragmentary, although as children grow older the game becomes longer and more detailed. Favorite stories and activities are often repeated, but even with repetition new ideas are constantly generated, thus fostering continued imaginative growth for the children.

Read aloud and tell stories. Good literature suggests many possibilities and discourages a tendency to imitate situations seen on television. However, many ideas may come from real life issues, even for very young children.

Finally, enjoy these spontaneous moments. Remember that they are the child's first engagement with an art form and can lead to lifelong pleasure. You are not encouraging a career in the theater; you are helping in the development of a human being through this most human of the arts, the theater.

**There is no way to fast forward and know how the kids will look back on this (theater program), but I have seen the joy in their eyes and have heard it in their voices and I have watched them take a bow and come up taller.** Willie Reale

Artistic Director, 52nd Street Project

**What does creative drama offer to young children?**

Creative drama provides many benefits, among them:

- Development of imagination and aesthetic awareness
- Independent and critical thinking
- Social growth and the ability to work with others
- Improved communication skills
- Healthy release of emotion
- Knowledge of self
- Fun and recreation
- An introduction to the theater

**What do you, as a parent, get out of it?**

Creative drama offers benefits for parents too:

- Quality time spent with your young child in creative moments.
- Valuable insights into the observations, impressions, interests, fears and humor that your child reveals.



**Finding creative resources**

Because creative drama is a group activity requiring skilled leadership, you should check with your child's teacher or principal to see whether it is already part of the school program. It may be that you will want to look further to find opportunities in your community for classes in the performing arts. While many schools are now adding theater to the curriculum, unfortunately it is absent in most elementary schools. Therefore, you should look for available resources in the following places:

- Community centers and city or county recreation departments.
- Libraries, museums, churches, playgrounds and camps, YMCAs and YWCAs.
- Local colleges and universities for year-round or summer classes for children.
- Performing arts centers, professional and community theaters.

Many facilities have splendid programs in the arts. Visit classes, check the age levels of the children and the preparation of the teachers. Classes in creative drama, puppetry, mime and dance offer enrichment beyond whatever the school provides. Again, for the young child, the chance to explore creatively and act spontaneously is more valuable than pressured situations involving either a performance for an audience or a predetermined product.

While creative drama involves children as active participants, children's theater engages them as audience. Plays range from entertainment for the primary grades to more mature material designed for junior high school. Many adult plays can be enjoyed by older teenagers and (depending on the subject matter and the style of the production) by younger audiences as well.

Children's theater companies should be checked carefully before taking a child to a performance or engaging a company for a school assembly. Many plays are over-simplified for the very young, with occasional lines aimed at the adults in the audience; this is a condescending practice and children are quick to perceive it. Some good sources of information about children's theater companies are: theater departments of colleges and universities; newspaper reviews, if available; local or state arts councils; the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE). In addition, many regional arts agencies support touring theaters for children and young audiences. Your state arts council can put you in touch with the regional organization for your area.

**Benefits of attending the theater**

Going to the theater has many benefits for children, among them:

- Appreciation of theater as an aesthetic experience, increased awareness of social and cultural values.
- Sharing in a communal art form.
- Increased knowledge of history and human events.

**Elements of a good production**

By attending children's theater regularly, both parent and child gain personal likes and dislikes and can grasp what is an excellent production as opposed to one that is poor or merely competent. If you have not attended children's theater regularly, here are some elements that characterize a good production, along with some questions concerning each element. Not every criterion will apply to every production.

Children's theater includes a wide range of subject matter: folk and fairy tales; contemporary social issues, adventure stories; historical and biographical dramas. The form may be the straight dramatic play, the musical, documentary, or movement theater. In every case, however, the story line or theme should be clear and honestly presented and the production should be enjoyable.

- *A good story.* Children's theater today is wide-ranging, offering plays from traditional fairy tales to homelessness and drug abuse. Whatever the topic, a good production will clarify its subject. Did you learn something new or gain a new insight through the play?

- *Credible characters.* A "willing suspension of disbelief" is necessary for viewing theater, but the characters should be believable. Did actions seem totally out-of-character for someone in the play. If so, did you lose interest in the action?

- *Excellent performance skills (acting, dance, music, and any other skills called for such as juggling, fencing, etc.).* Do the skills support the believability of the characters? Are they at a level befitting the expectations of the actors, both in terms of the amateur or professional status of the company and the actions of the characters?

- *Effective visual elements.* Do scenery, costumes, and lighting help transport you to the place and time of the play. Are they visually appealing? In cases where scenery and lighting are minimal or absent, did the production stimulate your imagination in other effective ways?

- *Challenging ideas.* A good script can provoke thought, bring new ideas to light, perhaps help you look at a facet of life in a new or different way. Ask your child what he or she got from a performance. Try open-ended questions such as: What did you see on the stage? What was a particular character trying to do? What happened at the very beginning? The discussion you are likely to have may surprise you.

- *Insight into other cultures.* Theater can take us in time and place to other communities and cultures. Did the production help you to learn about cultural or ethnic traditions? If the play was in the present time, were there characters of culturally diverse backgrounds reflecting contemporary society?

- *Strong emotional response and involvement in the plot.* Were you moved by the action of the play? Tears or laughter are sure signs that the playwright and actors reached you. While emotions can't always be verbalized, a discussion with your child about his or her feelings about what happened can benefit both of you.

*For more information, contact:*

*American Alliance for Theatre & Education*
*3418 N. Narrows Drive*
*Tacoma, WA 98407*

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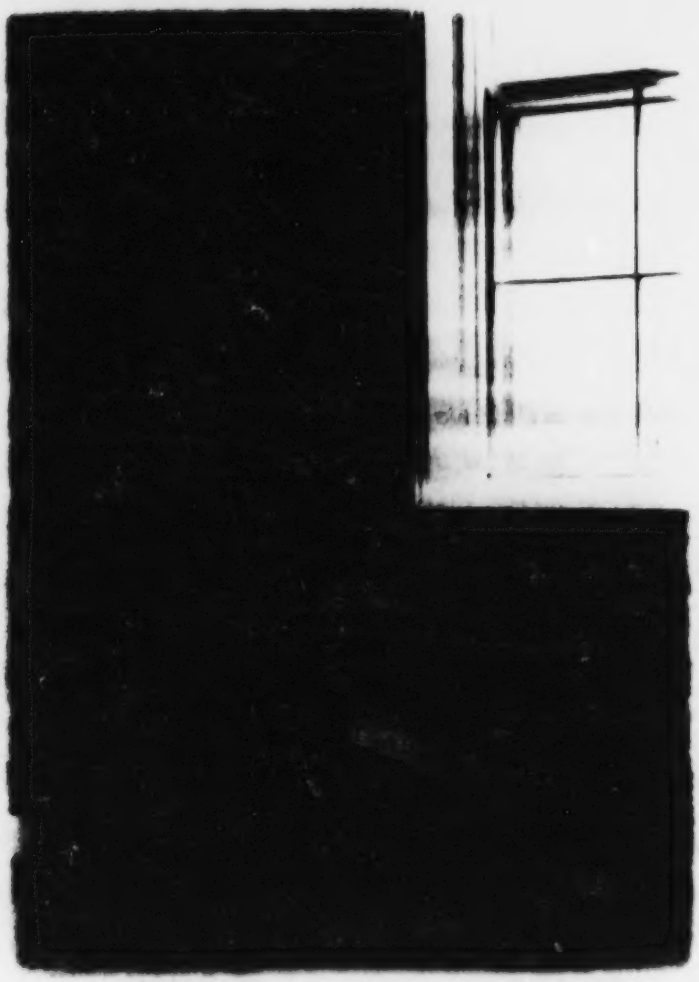
# your child and the visual arts

The visual arts interpret and reflect life. Through studying art, children gain valuable insights about the world along with knowledge and skills they can use throughout their lives.

Art education—appreciation courses, hands-on art classes, museum visits and parent-assisted activities—helps children develop their own creative skills and understand the artistic work of others. By encouraging visual arts education, you will help your children to:

- respond to what they see in art and in the world around them;
- perceive and grasp relationships in their environment;
- think creatively while developing skills in drawing, painting, sculpting, designing, crafting;
- gain manipulative and organizing skills through their own creative work;
- learn about humankind's vast cultural heritage;
- understand the nature of art and the creative process;
- make informed aesthetic judgements about art.

To educate children, parents along with teachers and museum professionals must keep in mind each student's interests as well as his intellectual, social and aesthetic maturity. The instruction should be interesting in order to stimulate intellectual growth. Not all activities should get the same emphasis at each age or for each student. Find opportunities that allow your child to:



- Take close looks at both natural and cultural objects of many kinds.
- Find outlets for expressing perceptions and feelings through a variety of art forms suited to the child's abilities and preferences.
- Experiment with different materials and methods in order to understand their different properties.
- Evaluate and review the child's work so that the youngster is understanding of formal structure and the potential for developing line, form, color, shape and texture.
- Read about, look at, and discuss works of art from other past and modern cultures; to do this, use different educational, media and community resources.
- Evaluate the child's works of art as well as those of artists past present.
- See artists and designers at work in classroom and museum demonstrations, on film and video.
- Engage in arts activities—museum visits, tours of art schools, participation in art classes—to apply new knowledge the child earned.

Here are activities you can use to introduce your child to the world of art. Remember that your own attitudes make strong impressions on your child. A sense of openness to the visual arts of diverse cultures, along with a willingness to ask questions about art, are as important for you as for the child.

**Every child is an artist.**

**The problem is how**

**to remain an artist once**

**he grows up.**

### At home and about town

"Seeing" versus looking is something you can encourage every day. Teach your child to see colors, shapes and textures in the world at large. Help your child recognize and understand the signs and symbols that abound in our lives. Make a game out of identifying elements of art as you ride in the car or take family walks. You will discover art all around: in local architecture, monuments, billboards, a park's design, the patterns of streets and signs as well as in traditional arts and crafts. Encourage your child to react to visual stimuli—colors, shapes, sizes, textures and materials—found in art dealing with a wide range of situations and subjects. Some will be more engaging than others. Children generally prefer bright colors, realism and familiar subject matter.

**To help get children involved**

Find a wall at home that your children can use to display reproductions or original art that they have created. Or set up an exhibition in an "art corner."

- Provide a space in which your child can explore different media such as paints, crayons and clay. (Pick an easy-to-clean space and dress in washables.)
- Make available various two- and three-dimensional materials: paper to cut-and-paste, blocks to build.
- Ask the art teacher at school about appropriate materials for your child at different development levels.



**To keep interest alive**

- Encourage and compliment your child's creative efforts. Ask the youngster to tell you about the art. Do *not* say what you think is "wrong" with it or how you think it should be done.
- Remind yourself that complex and fine motor skills take time to develop. Offer experiences that strengthen skills already learned. Provide materials and tools that broaden the range of creativity.
- Remember that many children paint and draw for no other reason than the pleasure it gives them. These activities can be easily fostered.

**At the museum, gallery or arts center**

Planned in advance, a visit to a local art center, gallery or museum can be rewarding, exciting and stimulating for both parent and child. Your state arts agency or local council can provide information about art exhibitions where they are, and what there is to see. Ask about programs designed for children and about parent-and-child events.

Take time to plan your visit so that it meets your child's physical and learning needs. Identify in advance the exhibit areas and art works you wish to see. Learn where benches, restrooms and cafeterias are located.

- Don't overwhelm or tire children by overdoing it. If you are visiting a large museum, stay in two or three galleries, depending on the child's age and abilities. A number of short visits are better than a long one that is overwhelming.
- By listening carefully to your child before planning a trip, you will learn what things he or she is most interested in seeing. Remember to meet a child's physical need for movement and change while engaged in "seeing and appreciating." If a child expresses interest in a work of art you did not select, spend time with it. Children may get frustrated at having to view art selected for them, rather than what they choose for themselves.

Younger children have both a shorter attention span and lower level of retention. For the very young, pictures and drawings in books can spark interest in the visual arts and you can build from there. It is a good idea to have children view works of art on several occasions. They'll remember some vividly, while a second visit and talking about the works will reinforce first impressions.

Also, it is good to encourage children to respond to pictures, sculptures and crafts in their own way. Resist the urge to tell them what they should see, feel or think. After a first experience, you can discuss the art, listening to the child's interpretation. Then share information you have about the work, the artist who made it, and how it was achieved. The facts you share should be appealing and easy to understand.

A word of warning: At the first sign of boredom, fatigue or disinterest, take a rest or quit for the day!

**More suggestions for making the arts enjoyable**

Museum shops sell postcards, posters of art works and books about art and artists for especially for children. Your child may want to buy a book or reproduction of a particular favorite.

Emphasize what the child understands and learns. Make connections with what he already knows. Ask what she is studying in school that relates to pictures you saw. Tie your "seeing" experiences into those subjects.



**Special art classes**

To get professional arts training for your child, check with your school's art teacher, or with your local or state arts agency for the names of qualified instructors and schools.

*For more information, contact:*

*National Art Education Association*
*1916 Association Drive*
*Reston, VA 22091*



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# media literacy and children

The final decade of the 20th century may one day be considered the dawn of the Digital Age. The media—television, film, video, radio, audio art, video games, computers, and the Internet—make a tremendous amount of information available to each and every child. While literally having the world at their fingertips for the first time in history is an exciting educational prospect for our children, the sheer mass of images and sounds can be daunting.

The media arts include:

*Film and video*, as art forms themselves, including the arts on television—such as broadcasts of performing arts events, continuing series, dramatic films and video, and other programs that use television as a medium to introduce children to the arts;

*Radio and audio art*, including programming on the radio, music and the spoken word.

*New media*, including the World Wide Web, which can be a vehicle for communicating information about the arts or digital, interactive computer art.

**[In the future], the crisp line between love and duty will blur by virtue of a common denominator—being digital.... Tomorrow, people of all ages will find a more harmonious continuum in their lives, because, increasingly, the tools to work with and the tools to play with will be the same.**

*Nicholas Negroponte, Being Digital*

As a parent, you can encourage your child to explore and discover all of these art forms in a number of ways. Of central importance is to watch and listen with your child and discuss the content of the programs. Parents have a responsibility to guide their children, to help them make informed choices among the many media art forms broadcast.

Public television, for example, is home to many excellent art programs, offered commercial free. Likewise public radio regularly broadcasts musical concerts, variety programs, and other programs designed for families to listen together. Parents concerned about the content of media arts should consult guides and rating systems offered from a host of sources. The film industry, for example, has voluntarily adopted a rating system that can easily clue parents to any given film's appropriateness for their own children.

You can help your child develop a positive outlook to all of the media by:

- Encouraging your child's curiosity and imagination through experiencing a variety of art through the media.
- Making watching television or videos, using the Internet, or listening to the radio a family affair.
- Respecting and acknowledging your child's interests, while setting clear guidelines on the amount of time and type of programming you structure in the child's daily life.
- Suggesting imaginative responses to the media arts.

**How to be active**

Given the demands of time, work and family life, it is impossible for any parent to monitor everything their child sees, hears and experiences. To develop and encourage sound participation in the media arts, however, you can foster a climate that treats the media arts as an active pursuit rather than a passive one. In addition to talking with your children about what they watch and hear, you can encourage your child to play and experiment with the media arts.

*Children's museums and technology centers.* At many major metropolitan areas across the country, first-rate children's museums offer opportunities for your children to have hands-on experiences with the media arts. Some may have a radio or television "station" they can explore. Others use computers to engage children in interactive exploration—from science to the arts.

*At school.* Some school districts have resources available to set up their own in-house studio for video production, audio production, or computer centers. Participate. Don't worry about the quality of the production. Encourage children by answering their questions and listening to their works. Your responses can help them understand how to achieve their own goals.

*Make a movie together.* With a hand-held video camera, almost everyone can become a director, producer and star of their own film. Encourage your child to use the video camera to tell a story, perhaps using your family and friends as actors in the film or as the subject of the story. Write a script and film it. Hold the screening at Your Home Movie House. Or using a tape-recorder, you and your child can create a radio play together.

*Create your own Web site.* Many schools and commercial Internet services provide low-cost opportunities for children to become involved on the World Wide Web. While the Web is certainly a great source of information and learning, it is also a place for creativity. Using online services, you can create your own Web site, publishing stories, photos, even video and audio.

*Make choices together.* Given their own resources, young children might prefer to watch cartoons all day. Common sense is your guide. When helping your children decide, be fair and respectful of the child's preferences, but firm in your desire to enrich and broaden your child's experiences and outlook.

**Why media literacy is important**

As the quantity of images and sounds increases, all of us—and especially children—need to remember that all media are "constructions." Regardless of how high the fidelity of a sound recording or a movie soundtrack, or how detailed the definition of new forms of television or film, or how realistic a virtual reality landscape in a video game, all media forms are constructed by people with a specific purpose in mind.

The skill and artistry of media professional makes it easy to disregard the boundaries separating the real world from the carefully constructed world represented in the media. Media literacy gives children the knowledge to be critical viewers. Understanding how the media arts are actually made allows audiences to appreciate the best of the art form while also protecting them from harmful effects of media biases or inaccuracies.

Right now plans are unfolding to help wire every school in the nation, and in due course, virtually every student will have access to a tremendous amount of technology. Television programs are proliferating, and there are tens of thousands of films and videos accessible to everyone. Compact disks, storing hundreds of thousands of words and images, are growing in number as well.

More media means more to learn. Children are up to the task; in fact, they readily adapt to new technology more quickly than their parents. In the social and economic infrastructure of the 21st century, every child should be media literate. That means not only knowing how to use the new technology, but what to use it for, and why.

As with all of the arts, parents should be there to guide children through the intricacies. Film and videomakers, television and radio producers, computer artists and other new media artists interpret and reflect life through drama, images and sound. Through studying the media arts, children can gain valuable insights about the world around them, but only if they receive quality media education in their schools, encouragement and guidance at home, and have an active role and attitude toward the media. Film, television, radio, music, the Internet all make strong impressions on your children. Be there to share the experience.

*Consult the appendix for sources for more media education resources.*

# from words to stories

All young children love to play with words. They love to make jokes and puns, sing songs, invent names and listen to and tell stories. It is a short step from loving such language play to loving writing.

You can help your child make that short but important step:

- Encourage your child's curiosity and imaginative play.
- Make reading an important part of your family life.
- Respect your child's interests in writing and reading.
- Suggest imaginative ways to write for school and for fun.

**Preparing your child for writing**

Your family's attitudes and habits can make learning to write natural and fun for your child rather than hard and frustrating. You can lay a firm foundation for future writing by reading and telling stories to your child; by letting your child know that you, too, enjoy and learn from books; by respecting your child's curiosity and imagination.

Reading and listening to stories help make writing easier. Children who read or hear stories regularly develop a natural understanding of how sentences, ideas and narratives work, and so have a much easier time later when these skills are "taught" to them in school. Reading can also make your child more eager to write. Just as young sports fans long to go out onto the playing fields, so children who love reading want to make up their own stories and poems.

Here are three ways to prepare your child for writing:

Read aloud to your children, even when they are very little. When you read aloud, children get not only a good story but also a moment of intimacy with you that adds to their good feeling about books and writing. Also, the fact that you take the trouble to read shows that you respect the written word. Keep reading aloud even after children can read on their own. You can read more advanced books than your child is reading, or return to old favorites together. As children listen, they come to see that different kinds of writing have different effects on us.

Encourage children to read by taking them to the library. Give books as presents. Be patient. Don't worry if at first your child is interested only in comics. Children who enjoy reading simple books will move on to more mature ones.

Answer your children's questions and listen to their stories. If children think that you don't care about what they say, they will not feel confident about expressing themselves, aloud or on paper. Also, your explanations help them understand how to organize their own thoughts.

**"Writing" before your child can write**

Writing with children helps them learn to organize their ideas and stories and to think of themselves as authors. Here are a few ways to have fun "writing" with children who can't yet write on their own

*"Tell me a story."* Ask your child to tell you a story. Write it down as it is told. Don't worry if you are a slow writer. While waiting for you to finish copying a line, your child will be thinking about what happens next in the story. If your child loses track of the story, you can help by reading it back and by asking questions like: "So then what happened?" or "What about the bad pirate?" Be careful not to "steal" the story by making too many suggestions. Children might take your contributions as criticisms, and end up feeling as if they have failed.

*The team story.* This is a good party game. Ask your child and some friends to form a circle and take turns making up one big story together. If the children are shy, you can start it off. Keep going until everyone has had a turn or the story feels finished, then read it back with gusto. You'll be surprised by how much fun this is.

*Playtime.* Young children spend much of their free time pretending they are other people—superheroes, princesses,astronauts. Creating a play is a natural literary form for children. Have your child (perhaps with some friends) dictate a play or story to you. When it is finished, the children can act it out. Let them change the play as they act it out, if they wish.

*"Publication."* Just like adult authors, children write to entertain themselves, but they also like to have other people appreciate their work. There are many ways to "publish" your children's writing. You can put it up on a bulletin board or the refrigerator. You can type it, read it aloud, or photocopy it and give it to family, friends and teachers. You can also make a child's writing into little books (with illustrations by the author) and keep them on a special shelf.

**Writing for school**

Much of your child's writing will be done at school. One way to help your child enjoy school writing is to take an interest in it. Give special praise for those compositions based on imaginative assignments—stories, poems, etc.—because these are the sort your child is most likely to want to try doing independently.

If a child enjoys writing in school, provide the time and space at home to continue writing and encourage imaginative experiments. If your child is bored by school writing assignments, try to find ways of making them more interesting. Say the assignment is to answer the question "What is love?" One way of answering is to be wacky: "Love is a school bus full of rutabagas." Another is to be honest: "I don't know what love is. Sometimes I hate the people I am supposed to love. . . ." Remember, many teachers like surprising responses.

**Writing at home**

Many children begin writing on their own at home simply because it is fun. For some this is a natural outgrowth of writing with their parents. Other children need encouragement.

The first thing you should do to encourage your child to write at home is provide the basics that all writers need, young or old:

- The tools of the trade: paper, pencils and pens; if possible a typewriter or computer.
- A place to write that is comfortable and quiet.
- Time enough not only to write but to look for inspiration by daydreaming and letting the imagination wander.

You can make writing special by allowing your child to use your desk, your typewriter or computer, or just your favorite pen. You can fold several sheets of typing paper in half, staple the folded edge, and say, "Here is an empty book, ready to be filled!"

Don't be pushy. Encouraging your child to write is a delicate matter. Many children react to pressure by becoming afraid of failure. Many children don't want to write because they're afraid of making spelling mistakes. Tell children that when they write poems and stories for themselves, they don't have to spell everything right. Only when children are ready to revise or publish their writing do they need to go over spelling, punctuation, etc. School homework is a required activity for children, but writing poems and stories at home ought to be voluntary—suggested only as a way of having fun. Children will write a lot if they enjoy it.

If your children already like to write at home, it is probably best not to meddle. Children will enjoy writing more if they feel that it is really their own. But if they ask for help, or you see that they are running out of inspiration, here are a few ideas you could try:

**I am watching my two-year-old grandson as he sits on his mother's lap listening to her reading aloud *Goodnight Moon*. This is the third time around this evening, and as she finishes once again ("Goodnight noises everywhere"), he does his part, which is to repeat as loudly as possible the word "Again!"** Linda Pastan, poet

- *Riddles.* Ask your child to describe something without revealing what the thing is. Example: "I come from a land where everything is upside-down. I have a pocket but I don't wear clothes. I have four legs but I don't walk. What am I?" (Answer: a kangaroo.) Writing riddles improves children's ability to describe accurately.

- *Apologies.* Suggest that your child write a series of apologies for wild offenses. Example: "I'm sorry I told your mother that a pack of meat-eating butterflies had eaten your little sister, but I couldn't think of anything else to say and I didn't know she'd believe me." To make a surprising apology, your children will have to visualize a situation vividly.



- *Impossible day.* Suggest that your child write a story about a day when only impossible things happened. Example: "While my father was riding his crayon, a camel flew in and kissed my mother on the cheek." The more impossible, the better. The joy of this type of story is that it invites children to search their minds for startling words and combinations.

- *First sentences.* Help your child start a story by providing a first sentence that sets up a strange or intriguing situation. For example: "On Saturday morning I noticed a flower beginning to grow out of the center of my forehead." Or, "When we reached the mountaintop, we found a rope hanging from the sky." It takes creative and connected thinking to make an attractive story out of such ideas.

- *Photostories.* Suggest that children flip through a magazine until they find an interesting photograph. Then, have them write a story (without reading the caption or article) that describes what happened before, during and after the photograph was taken. This idea also works well with paintings and family photographs, particularly if they are of people or places the children have never known. Whatever the subject matter, the story will help your children think logically and creatively about events.

- *Dialogues.* Suggest that your child write a conversation between two related objects, like a pencil and paper, a fork and meat, their own feet and the sidewalk. How would it feel to be the floor? How would it feel to be feet? Creating dialogues helps children think about the ways objects or ideas are linked.

Your response to your children's writing is all-important. If you are proud of what they have written at home or at school, they will also be proud and will want to do more. If you are indifferent or too critical, they will find writing much more difficult.

First point out what you like in your child's writing. Praising children's strengths is a much more effective way of helping them to write well than pointing out weaknesses. You can always find something to praise. Be specific and honest. If you praise everything uniformly, your praise will lose its impact.

Be very gentle with your criticisms, especially with beginning writers. Always introduce your concerns after some praise. Remember that your main purpose is not to turn the child into a Shakespeare, but to encourage the child to enjoy writing. As long as children keep writing, they will improve.

Praise what is unique or unexpected in your child's work, even if it seems a bit out of place, for it is in such unconventional parts that children are often truest to their own way of seeing things. If children feel free to be "different," they are much more likely to value writing as a mode of genuine self-expression.



Don't worry if your child wants to write only about superheroes or puppies. A child who enjoys writing will inevitably move on to other topics.

*For more information contact:*

*Teachers & Writers Collaborative*
*5 Union Square West*
*New York, NY 10003*
http://www.twc.org

*T&W writers Stephen O'Connor and William Bryant Logan developed this narrative.*

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# folk arts: art in everyday life

All cultures and communities feel a need to develop artistic traditions. These traditions may be as ancient as myths and storytelling, or inherently contemporary, such as jump rope rhymes and children's songs that parody popular television shows. Old or new, artistic traditions serve a number of purposes:

- Fostering a sense of group belonging;
- Creating a shared framework of understanding for productive communication;
- Helping groups reflect on basic life questions and concerns;
- Making life interesting, creating beauty and fun in unexpected places; and
- Exemplifying ingenuity, often making creative use of preexisting resources.

As parents, we want the best for our children, which includes exposing them to a rich range of art forms: dance, music, visual arts, theater, creative writing... the list goes on. One of the best ways to interest children in art is to help them explore connections between their own life experiences and the artistic processes

of others. Most children already are artists who practice a significant range of art forms—it's just that we as adults have difficulty recognizing children's art because we have forgotten the extent to which art is a fundamental human impulse that is part of everyday life.

**Getting started**

Talking with your children about the games that they play is a wonderful way to begin exploring folk arts with them. Games encompass all artistic disciplines:

- sidewalk chalk drawings and finger-painting are visual art;
- parody songs are a combination of music, poetry, and creative composition;
- forts and dollhouses are design arts;
- puppetry, dress-up, and magic shows are theater;
- folded paper fortune-tellers, lanyards, and costume-making are craft; and
- clapping games, cheers, jump rope, and bicycle tricks are creative movement.

Ask your children to teach you the games that they play with their friends. As you learn more about their play worlds, try to find out as much as you can about their aesthetics. Most children spend hours practicing their favorite forms of play. Ask your children what makes a given game "good" and what the standards of excellence are that players strive for. They will probably appreciate your interest and tell you, in great detail, things about their pastimes that you never knew. This conversation will also create an opening for you to teach them about your childhood games. Together you can compare similarities and differences, discussing play aesthetics in detail.

**Venturing out into your local community**

The beauty of exploring folk arts with your children is that traditional arts provide a dynamic framework for meeting lots of people, learning about a wonderful array of cultures, and experiencing sophisticated subject matter in unforgettable ways. For example, children who watch a master craftsman temper a piece of iron might see him demonstrate how the super-heated metal loses its magnetic field—rendering a difficult science concept both memorable and meaningful. When you and your children look for folk artists in your community, you help the children develop a curiosity about the world around them that is fundamental to lifelong learning. What festivals take place in your town, county, or region? You can find out about these events by looking in the newspaper, contacting your state arts council, or calling a local historical society.

Pull out a calendar and go through it with your children. What dates are special? Birthdays? Religious observances? Family reunions? Local festivals? You and your children might want to make a community calendar: photograph people and events, select the best shots, write captions, and work with your local photocopier to "publish" a calendar that you give as gifts to friends and family.

You and your children may want to document the traditions of your family and your neighbors. Ask friends and family about their often-told stories, handmade objects, songs, and dances. You might even want to make a community traditions video documentary with your children. You could hold a premiere screening of the video production in your living room—complete with popcorn and autographs.

Don't forget that cooking is also an art. Foodways are the most enduring tradition in any family, regional or ethnic group, persisting long after community members have forgotten old country language, dances, and other rituals. What foods are unique to your family, your community, or to the cultures of your neighbors? You may want to document these delicacies with your children, creating a community or family cookbook that includes photographs and oral histories.





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Every community has special artistic traditions, but some traditional artists are so good that they become revered as "folk masters." Each year the National Endowment for the Arts honors a select group of traditional artists through its National Heritage Fellowships program. What kinds of artists have received this award? John Jackson, Piedmont blues guitarist; Eppie Archuleta, Latina weaver from the San Luis Valley of Colorado; and New Hampshire split ash basketmaker Newt Washburn are among the past winners.

National Heritage Fellows include artists from both urban and rural communities, recognizing master traditional artists in every region of the United States. It's possible that one of these master artists may live in or close to your community. Visit our Internet site with your child and find out which past award winners live in your state (http://arts.endow.gov/Archive/Features6/allheritage.html). Once you've found these artists in cyberspace, try to find them in person—they may be performing at local gatherings or selling their artwork in local stores.

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All these project ideas are rich with educational possibilities. Encourage your children's teachers to strengthen school-community connections by incorporating folk arts into their ongoing lesson plans. A range of Folk Arts and Education resources are currently available on the Internet, including the National Endowment for the Arts publication, Folk Arts in the Classroom: Changing the Relationship Between Schools and Communities (http://artsedge.kennedycenter.org/db/cx/tskforce), and the Library of Congress, American Folklife Center's Teacher's Guide to Folklife Resources for K-12 Classrooms (gopher://marvel.loc.gov/00/research/reading.rooms/folklife/bibs/teachers). The Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies (202-287-3424) also produces a number of high quality educational materials.

If we take the time to stop, look, question, and listen, we discover that art is all around us in the form of folk arts. The process of exploring folk arts with our children helps us rediscover the fact that our families, neighbors, and communities constitute rich learning environments that are authentic and engaging.

*For more information about current Folk Arts and Education resources, contact:*

*National Task Force on Folk Arts*
*and Education*
*609 Johnston Place*
*Alexandria, VA 22031*

*This essay was written by Gail Matthews-DeNatale, Ph.D.*

**Art, especially the traditional arts, continually demonstrate the vital principle that sameness and differences always go together. A Texan and a Missouri fiddler may play the same tune, but they will not sound the same. One quilter will make a Log Cabin design, while another with the same fabrics will make a Nine Patch. The stability of being alike and the excitement of being different always go together and make life joyous, and we see this continually in art.** Bess Howell, folklorist



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# architecture and children

Architecture unites culture with perception and technology. The study of the built environment includes architecture, landscape architecture, historic preservation and planning. Buildings and community organization express peoples' needs and beliefs through the artistic organization of materials according to the laws of physics. Because children are natural builders, they enact this unity through their play.

**Young architects at work**

When children build zoos with blocks, make forts out of blankets, rearrange their doll houses and construct hideouts in the trees, they face all the challenges of grown-up architects. They have clients—dolls and figurines, toy animals, imaginary dragons or themselves—who need particular sorts of structures with dedicated functions: to fend off monsters, shelter a pet or keep out the boys. They use available materials and cope with their structural limitations and possibilities: sand, rocks, blocks and sheets can only do certain things, and these limitations define the ultimate forms that emerge. They face penalties if they ignore

local building ordinances, such as that you're not allowed to use Grandmother's heirloom quilt to make a tent. They must consider land use and site planning when they're trying to cram all of the cushions from the couch under the dining room table. They often have to negotiate with other designers and builders, who may have distinctly different ideas about the whole project. They have scheduling problems and deadlines, having to stop work to take a bath or do their homework. Problems of maintenance soon develop if the structure is vandalized by a younger sibling or somebody opens the door that the main tent cable is tied to. And, sooner or later, they face the anguish of demolition.

If you have a young architect in the house, you're very aware of it. Your household has been rearranged to accommodate boxes of all sizes transformed into castles or train stations, and designs for new projects cover pieces of paper. The best thing you can do when all of this is going on is to enjoy it, admire it effusively, and be sure that you move through your home with caution. As your architect grows, you can encourage these activities in a number of ways.



**Home is where the architecture is**

Start in your own home, of course. Draw a picture of the outside of your home with your child, each of you taking turns to add something. When you're all done, go out together and compare what you remembered to what's really there. Trace the outline of the building on a second piece of paper and draw what goes on inside your home, in the rooms behind the windows, with images of all of your family members doing different things. Glue the facade (your first drawing) onto the second picture so that the two images match up. Cut up through the center of the facade and out along the roof and the foundation so that the facade opens up to reveal the life and action inside.

Show your child how the plumbing and heating systems in your home work. Children are fascinated to see how the hot air from a furnace is sent to all of the rooms through ducts or radiators, and to learn where the water comes in from huge pipes under the ground outside. By explaining these systems, you connect your home with the world outside, which brings fuel in and takes waste out. You might start by making your child aware of some of the noises that these systems make—when



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water runs through the pipes or the furnace goes on and off— and saying that these noises are evidence of the ways that your home is taking care of your family.

#### Architecture in literature

When you read stories to your child, pay attention to the descriptions of the buildings and rooms in the stories, which set the time and mood and tell much about the characters and their plights. Story characters get locked in towers and dungeons, scale enormous walls, hide on balconies, and find respite in warm, hospitable kitchens. Writers lavish attention on their descriptions of the city of Oz, a Maya pyramid, or an African marketplace, often introducing many new words to your child's vocabulary, and illustrators take pains to capture these descriptions in their pictures. Take an extra moment or two together with these written images, and wander around a bit in the pictures to see if they fit together. If your son has a different idea about how the witch's house should look, encourage him to make his own illustrations. By focusing on the architectural descriptions in stories and books, you not only foster a familiarity with the buildings of other places and times, but also give your child valuable experience in reading comprehension.

**Under construction**

Provide materials and space for your child's building enterprises, especially for small model-making. You can recycle innumerable items from your kitchen: corks, berry containers, egg cartons, straws, covered wire twist-ties, cereal boxes, cardboard tubes, and plastic containers become walls, columns, beams and domes. Scraps of fabric, paper clips, and pipe cleaners can all be pressed into service. Show your young builder how to use bobby pins or small pieces of tape to clamp pieces together while the glue dries. These efforts at small-scale building offer an array of experiments with the physical properties of different materials, and allow a child to experience the principles of balance, strength, rigidity, flexibility, stability, and the distribution of weight. You can teach him how to name these properties, and encourage him to begin to predict what might happen if he tries to support a heavy piece of wood with one paper straw.

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- Suggest that your child design a zoo, constructing a unique enclosure for each animal who lives there. Very basic research—you can get all the information you need from an encyclopedia—will show that each animal needs a special place to live, with specific requirements about temperature, access to water, open space and diet. They also need to be protected from the people who come to see them!

**On the streets where you live**

- Talk with your child about the buildings around you. When you're waiting for a bus or going shopping together, you're almost always surrounded by or going in and out of buildings. There are so many different kinds used for so many different purposes! How can you tell that this is a post office and that's a fire station, without reading the signs? Why are their doors different? Why doesn't a factory have windows? What are different buildings made of? Which ones are old and which are new? How can you tell? How do different buildings make you feel? What do you think they look like inside? Although the names of architectural styles are interesting, you don't need to know them to "read" buildings with your child.

- Show your child how to make rubbings by placing a piece of paper on a textured surface and rubbing it with the side of a crayon until the texture appears. This is a great way to make a collection of the surfaces and patterns of bricks, vent covers, and many other building materials that make up the built environment. Your child can make a book to hold these images or cut them out and apply them to building projects.

- Talk to your child about the many kinds of workers it takes to make a building. Architects and engineers work with contractors who

**Design is too fundamental to education to be separated out and then engaged in occasionally. Any time I can demonstrate for my students the necessity for and the application of learning and thinking then I gain credibility. Recognizing the importance of design in education moves the classroom from the hypothetical to the real world.** *William Perry, eighth grade teacher, Pittsburgh public schools*

oversee masons, carpenters, roofers, electricians, and plumbers, all people with specialized knowledge who need to coordinate their efforts. They all need to know how to measure very carefully and must be able to explain things to each other not only in words but through drawings.

When you travel, the architecture will change from one region to another. Talk about this with your child. What's different here? Not only the styles but the shapes, the ornament, and the materials of the buildings. These changes are expressions of shifts in culture and climate. The roofs may be flat because there's not much rainfall, or very steep because there's more snow. Local stone will change the color, texture and pattern of walls. Houses will often be connected in areas of dense population and spread apart in more rural areas. Make a journal for your child to record family trips by drawing some of the interesting buildings or structures that you visit. Do this yourself! Architectural monuments such as the Empire State Building or the Eiffel Tower are part of the reason for taking the trip in the first place, and there's no better way to hold a memory than by drawing what you've gone to see. You can use the same journal and keep your drawings side by side with your child's!



**The drawing board**

When your young architect is a bit older—from about the third grade—you can show her how to draw floor plans. Examples abound in the real estate section in your newspaper; it doesn't take professional training to understand or draw them. Give your child graph paper to help keep the lines straight. Once she's more comfortable with math, you can explain that each square on the paper represents one foot in real life, but don't worry about that for a while. You might simply remark on the relative sizes of the rooms.

Explain the graphic symbols used for doorways and windows in floor plans if your child is curious about them, and decipher the abbreviations. Encourage her to draw in the furniture, appliances, and even the people using the building, but be aware that children do not readily draw "in plan," that is, from the top looking down, which is the orientation of this kind of drawing. You can explain this convention as a bird's eye view and put objects on the floor so that she can see how different they look when she stands straight over them, but don't expect her to adopt this method right away. She'll still draw most of the room's contents from the side or mix the two viewpoints. Eventually, she'll be able to compute perimeter and square footage using floor plans.



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Ask your child to draw a map from memory of his route from home to school. Prompt him to think of the sequence of streets he crosses, the twists and turns he takes, and any special landmarks along the way. Then have him embellish or revise the map as he walks the route. This is a great lesson in observation and a wonderful communication skill.

These activities suggest the scope of the study of architecture. It is a combination of math, physics, geology, geography, chemistry, history, life science, social studies and aesthetics. It combines verbal, symbolic and graphic thinking. *Many children, in fact, have strengths in the kind of visual, spatial and tactile thinking that are invoked in architectural design and analysis that they may not be called upon to use in other school subjects.* The abilities to think in three dimensions, to visualize images described in words, to figure out how to construct something efficiently, to read symbols and graphic conventions, or to think in terms of relationships and connections, are all skills that can be applied to other subjects and life experiences.

There are dozens of excellent children's books specifically about architecture, suitable to all ages and interests. Cutaway views and overlays describe the structures of the world's great monuments and describe the materials, tools and scientific knowledge that created them. There are many picture and story books that describe the housing and social organization of other cultures living in different climates, and also the incredible variety of homes made by animals. Don't overlook the dictionary and encyclopedia, which are filled with descriptions and illustrations of architectural terms.



*For more information, contact:*

*The Foundation for Architecture, Philadelphia*
*One Penn Center at Suburban Station, Suite 1165*
*Philadelphia, PA 19103*
*http://whyy.org/aie//aie.html*

*This essay was prepared by Marcy Abhau and Pam Carunchio.*

# music and your child's education

Why should your child study music? From elementary school onwards, music study helps children acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes that influence them throughout their lives. In addition to learning music for its own sake, children who participate in music learn coordination, goal-setting, concentration, and cooperation.

As a parent, you can encourage your child's love of music and nurture his or her musical talents in a number of ways: by listening to good music programs and recordings together; by attending musical events and making music as a family; by praising children for their musical activities; and accomplishments. As a result of music-listening and music-making experiences, elementary school children can become better listeners and develop musical intelligence. They also develop pride and a sense of accomplishment as young musicians.

Listening to music, moving to music and playing musical games are best for small children and good for elementary students as well. By ages five to eight, many children are ready for one-on-one music lessons. You can help your child choose an instrument by consulting the school music teacher and by noticing what

sounds your child most enjoys while listening to music. If you decide to supplement lessons offered at the school with private lessons, you can find a good teacher by asking the school music teacher or the music faculty at a local university for recommendations.

Group classes are particularly supportive for young children. In the early stages, a parent should be in the room with the child during at-home practice periods to offer encouragement and praise and to request specific songs. It is impossible to give any child too much encouragement. Success at music-making bolsters self-esteem.

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**When to start**

Children can begin piano lessons whenever they can sit on a piano bench and concentrate.

Stringed-instrument study can begin very early (if scaled-down instruments are used) preferably by grade four.

Study on wind instruments should begin by grade five.

You can invest in your child's future by ensuring that your school has good music programs, taught by certified music specialists in general music, instrumental music and choral instruction from pre-kindergarten through high school.

**What to look for in an elementary school**

Opportunities for all students: to sing, move to music, and learn to play classroom instruments; to develop skills in performing, reading, creating, listening to and describing music; to learn to use music vocabulary and read and write music notation; to develop enjoyment of and sensitivities to music; to explore music from a variety of cultures.

Opportunities for students to participate in both choral and instrumental music starting in grade four.

Special experiences for gifted and handicapped students.

Instruction by certified music educators supplemented by classroom teachers.

Adequate textbooks, printed music, instruments, equipment, recordings and other music materials.

Music rooms that have adequate space, ventilation and light as well as access to a good piano, risers, audiovisual equipment and a good sound system.

Students in grades one through three should learn to enjoy and explore music. By the end of grade three, students should realize that music is an important part of everyday life and be able to perform and create it. They should be able to use music as a means of individual expression and to listen to the creations of other people with respect, curiosity and pleasure.

Students in grades four through six should build on the skills they developed earlier. By the end of grade six, they should be able to participate in music activities by singing and playing instruments. They should enjoy listening to most types of music, and be able to describe musical works and discuss their personal responses to them.





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The trouble with music appreciation in general is that people are taught to have too much respect for music; they should be taught to love it instead.

**How to make your child's life musical**

Encourage your child to participate in general music classes and performing ensembles.

When school offers band or string instrument instruction, help your child choose an instrument.

Visit the classroom to gain a better understanding of what takes place in the music program.

Volunteer to chaperon trips to music events and work to bring outstanding performers to your child's school.

Attend concerts with your child.

Help with home practice and set scheduled practice times. Set up a well-lit, quiet practice area free from distractions. Ask your child to play for you and others, and give sincere and frequent praise. Do not be overly critical; the music teacher will correct problems. Listen and show enthusiasm for your child's efforts and achievements.

At every age, your child should have regular opportunities to:

hear, sing or play music with and for family and friends in a relaxed setting.

take part in community music events that relate directly to the child's own culture and that involve distinctly different cultures.

join you in watching music and arts programs on television. (To make the most of these experiences, ask your child questions about the program afterward—not during the performance.)

*Additional information is available from:*

*Music Educators National Conference*
*1806 Robert Fulton Drive*
*Reston, Virginia 22091*
*http://www.menc.org/home.html*

**National Endowment for the Arts**
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20506
202/682.5400
http://arts.endow.gov

For a complete list of publications, visit the Arts Bookstore on the Endowment's Website or order a current catalogue from Public Information.



**U.S. Department of Education**
Washington, DC 20202
1-800/872.5327
http://www.ed.gov

Offers an extensive list of publications and other resources, including *Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Learning*.

**Alliance for Arts Education Network**
John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
Washington, DC 20566
202/416.8800
http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org

A comprehensive resource center for all areas of arts education. Their website, ARTSEDGE, was created through a cooperative agreement of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Department of Education, and the Kennedy Center.

**Goals 2000 Arts Education Partnership**
c/o Council of Chief State School Officers
Suite 700
One Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20001-1431
202/326.8683
http://www.ccsso.org/arts.htm

Resources on the Goals 2000 Arts Education Partnership to make the arts basic in all schools for kindergarten through high school.

**National Association for the Education of Young Children**
1509 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036-1426
202/232.8777
http://www.america-tomorrow.com/naeyc

**Center for Arts in the Basic Curriculum**
Suite 900
1319 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20004-1152
202/638-5196

**Getty Education Institute for the Arts**
Suite 600
1200 Getty Center Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90049-1683
310/440-7315
http://www.artsednet.getty.edu

A comprehensive resource center for all areas of arts education.

**Very Special Arts**
Suite 700
1300 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036
1-800/933.8721
202/737.0645 TDD
http://www.vsarts.org

The headquarters of an international arts organizations for people with disabilities. VSA centers are located in all fifty states.



### Architecture

**The Foundation for Architecture, Philadelphia**
One Penn Center at Suburban Station
Suite 1165
Philadelphia, PA 19103
http://whyy.org/aie//aie.html

The Foundation for Architecture publishes *Architecture In Education: A Resource of Imaginative Ideas and Tested Activities.* A new poster on STRUCTURE is also available.



### Dance

**National Dance Association**
1900 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091-1502
703/476.3436
http://www.aahperd.org/nda/nda.html

The Association publishes a number of pamphlets for teachers and parents on dance for children. Contact them for the latest list.

### Folk arts

**National Task Force on Folk Arts in Education**
609 Johnsten Place
Alexandria, VA 22301
703/836.7499

See the Folk Arts chapter for more information.

### Literature

**Teachers & Writers Collaborative**
5 Union Square West
New York, NY 10003
http://www.twc.org

Teachers & Writers publishes a magazine and scores of books on teaching creative writing.



### Media arts

**Center for Media Literacy**
Suite 403
4727 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90010
213/931.4177
http://websites.earthlink.net/~cml

The Center for Media Literacy offers a catalog of publications, videos, and teaching materials.

### Music

**Music Educators National Conference**
1806 Robert Fulton Drive
Reston, VA 22091
http://www.menc.org/home.html

MENC publishes the journal *Teaching Music* and dozens of other books and resources. Also available from MENC are the National Standards for Arts Education, a publication of the Consortium of National Arts Education Associations.

### Theater

**American Alliance for Theatre & Education**
3418 N. Narrows Drive
Tacoma, WA 98407

### Visual arts

**National Art Education Association**
1916 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091
703/860-8000
http://www.naea-reston.org/

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